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The Memo That Produced a Furor

A View of a World in Disorder

♦ Last week the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) made public a controversial 45-page memorandum called "Trends in the World Situation," written by Willard Matthias of the CIA's Board of National Estimates. The 12-member board's function is to prepare "think pieces concerned with broad assessment of the world situation."

The document was released after a section of it leaked to the press. That section expressed doubt that victory can be won in Vietnam. The State Department, apparently fearing Republicans would raise a political furor over the document, contended that it was not an official statement of Administration policy.

Following are excerpts from the memorandum:

The Threat of War

The decade of the 1950s witnessed fundamental changes in the structure of world power. . . . By the end of that decade, in contrast to its beginning, the U.S. no longer enjoyed military invulnerability, unchallengeable world power, or unique economic superiority. It was clear that the world was entering upon a new era. Not only was there a new political and military relation between the major powers, but new leaders were arriving upon the scene, political and social instability had become epidemic in the southern two-thirds of the world, and schisms and heresies were appearing within the Communist camp itself.

The U.S. possesses greater striking power than the USSR and could wreak much greater damage in the USSR than the latter could in the U.S. Nevertheless . . . a general nuclear war—whether brought about by design, accident, or miscalculation—would kill many millions of people, destroy the capital accumulations of many decades, render large sections of the earth uninhabitable, and destroy the power of most of the modern nations of the world.

In this age of mobile striking forces and hardened missile sites, it does not appear possible to build a military force capable of destroying an enemy's capabilities and simultaneously protecting oneself from unacceptable damage. . . . Thus if there is any valid and rational concept today upon which to develop and measure a strategic military force, it is that of deterrence.

But one cannot find any rule for determining that a stated level of forces will deter and that another will not. Deterrence is a mental state, and it depends to a preponderant degree not upon a precise level of force, but upon a variety of other factors, such as how the party to be deterred estimates the military forces arrayed against him and the balance of military power, how desperately he wants to achieve a given objective, how he estimates the chances of a political confrontation leading to hostilities, and how he estimates the chances of hostilities leading to a general conflict.

The Cuba Crisis

The Soviets probably undertook this initiative either in the expectation that the U.S. would accept it, or in the belief that the U.S. reaction could not be so accurately predicted as to preclude making the effort. . . . The U.S. had chosen not to run the political risks necessary to save the Bay of Pigs expedition, the U.S. had accepted the erection of the Berlin Wall with little more than verbal pyrotechnics, and the U.S. had accepted the neutralist solution in Laos. United States formal statements regarding Cuba conveyed an air of studied uncertainty. . . .

Thus it probably appeared to the Soviets that the diplomatic and military stance of the U.S. was that of a power seeking to avoid confrontation and fearful of its

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